

More on Emulation

My recent kick with emulation and retro gaming has brought me to do a little speculating. It's tough to miss the wide variety of 5-in-1 or "IO-in-1" or what-have-you games that plug directly into your television. A very recent example of these is the Atari Flashback, a tiny box with two small joystick controllers and 20 games built in, 15 from the Atari 2600VCS, and 5 from the relatively newer 7800 system. There are basically three ways to bring a "classic" game into the realm of modern hardware: recreate the original hardware, emulate the original hardware, or port the software to different hardware. The third option is well known, as nearly every game that went from arcade to home systems, or from one home system or computer to another, was ported, or rewritten for the new machine, sometimes totally from the ground up. Ported games are not often 100 percent accurate to their original source material, either due to limitations in the destination hardware, or poor attention to detail on the part of the programmers. Sometimes the programmers change or even improve a ported game due to personal preference, but that's another story.

In recent years, computer ability and horsepower has increased to the point where it's feasible to emulate another computer, game system, or arcade machine, and have the results be almost indistinguishable from the

original. Good emulation takes a lot of horsepower in most cases, even if the system you are emulating seems primitive. That kind of power is commonly found in most home computers, and even some modern game systems, but you're not likely to find it in some plaything you hook to your TV which costs between 10 and 50 dollars. With newer chip manufacturing, many examples of "classic" video gaming and computer hardware can be remade small and cheaply, especially compared to what that hardware cost back when it was new. A good example is the Commodore One hardware project, which was to create a modernized version of the Commodore 64 computer. This project has come to commercial fruition in the form of another TV-game-joystick system, packed with 30 C64 games, all running as if on the original hardware. I have heard it is even possible (with a little electronics work) to add a keyboard and disk drive, and make an entire Commodore computer out of a game joystick.

Contrary to popular belief, many of the XX-in-1 TV games systems don't use recreations of the original hardware like the Commodore stick. This is apparent in the case of the Arcade game sticks like Pac-Man or Space Invaders, where the originals had a vertical display which would not fit on a television screen. Many of these TV games use off-the-shelf cheap hardware, similar in specification to the 8 bit Nintendo Entertainment System from 1985, and games are ported to look and play as close to whatever system is

intended. That means the Intellivision gamestick is actually using Nintendo-like hardware. I learned the Atari Flashback was originally intended to have an on-a-chip version of the Atari 7800 hardware, but schedule did not permit it, (They wanted it out in time for holiday sales, not surprisingly) so the off-the-shelf Nintendo-ish hardware was used instead, and 20 Atari games were ported to that hardware in ten weeks (!). Such a tight schedule does not make for the best quality control, so several of the Flashback's games are poor imitations of the original versions from the 2600 or 7800. If the Flashback does well, newer, better versions using the intended 7800-compatible hardware might be made.

This leads me to my speculation. The "TV-game-joystick" market may be a fad, to drop off once people realize the price of a few of those specialized "retro" systems could easily buy a new Playstation which plays a less limited selection, much like dedicated TV Pong machines were supplanted by programmable cartridge machines like the VCS. Still, I can't help but wonder if we might see a "IO-in-1" AMIGA TV game joystick. It's not Atari VCS or Commodore 64, but the Amiga had millions of users at its peak, many of them game players. The Amiga was the focal point for many great games, which could go over well in a nostalgic joystick or mouse or whatever. The Psygnosis game collection alone would be worth a release for some.

And if an Amiga TV game was made, would it use a recreation of the original hardware? Would fans be hacking keyboards and hard drives onto their Amiga game sticks? Or would the Amiga game stick use the hardware from a Sega Genesis, and include poorly done recreations of Shadow of the Beast or Lemmings? While the idea of an Amiga TV Game joystick is unlikely at this point, it's a fun and curious thing to think about. Happy Holidays, folks.

*...Eric Schwartz
AmiTech-Dayton Gazette, December 2004*

New Definitions

New definitions from the Washington Post.

1. Coffee (n.), a person who is coughed upon.
2. Flabbergasted (adj.), appalled over how much weight you have gained.
3. Abdicate (v.), to give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach.
4. Esplanade (v.), to attempt an explanation while drunk.
5. Willy-nilly (adj.), impotent.
6. Negligent (adj.), describes a condition in which you absent-mindedly answer the door in your nightgown.

AmigaMCCC News

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January Calendar

January 10 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
7:30 pm — University Center, Pedernales Room
W. First St. & S. West St., Arlington

January 10 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
Approx. 10:00 pm — TGI Fridays
Cooper Street just south of I-20, Arlington

January 29 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am

7. Lymph (v.), to walk with a lisp.
8. Gargoyle (n.), an olive-flavored mouthwash.
9. Flatulence (n.), the emergency vehicle that picks you up after you are run over by a steamroller.
10. Balderdash (n.), a rapidly receding hairline.
11. Testicle (n.), a humorous question on an exam.
12. Rectitude (n.), the formal, dignified demeanor assumed by a proctologist immediately before he examines you.
13. Oyster (n.), a person who sprinkles his conversation with Yiddish expressions.
14. Pokemon (n.), A Jamaican proctologist.
15. Circumvent (n.), the opening in the front of boxer shorts.